



# **Vermont AmeriCorps State REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Program Year 2021-2022

Letter of Intent Deadline:  
October 9, 2020, 12:00 Noon

Application Deadline:  
November 6, 2020, 12:00 Noon

SerVermont

Agency of Human Services

Office of the Secretary

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(802) 760-0042

[servermont.vermont.gov](http://servermont.vermont.gov)

## **ABOUT SERVERMONT**

SerVermont is Vermont's State Service Commission and is housed in the Agency of Human Services' Central Office. SerVermont's mission is to promote, support, and recognize volunteerism and community service throughout Vermont. SerVermont administers national service programs federally funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) including the AmeriCorps State program, and an AmeriCorps VISTA umbrella project. SerVermont also manages volunteers in disasters and works with other national service and local partners to address pressing challenges in Vermont through service. SerVermont was established by Executive Order in 1993. The Governor appoints up to 25 individuals to serve three-year terms as members of the SerVermont Commission.

## **SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT**

SerVermont's single point of contact for this competition is Phil Kolling, Executive Director. Phil can be reached at (802) 760-0042 and/or [philip.kolling@vermont.gov](mailto:philip.kolling@vermont.gov)

## **AMERICORPS IN VERMONT**

On average, there are 250 AmeriCorps State members serving in SerVermont funded programs over the course of a program year. Through all streams of service (AmeriCorps State, National, VISTA, and NCCC, as well as Senior Corps) there are approximately 2,900 people of all ages and backgrounds serving in Vermont at over 500 locations.

SerVermont currently funds, monitors, and supports six AmeriCorps State programs through Formula and national Competitive grants from CNCS. In the last few years SerVermont has experienced an increase in interest from organizations interested in hosting an AmeriCorps program and/or AmeriCorps members, and expects strong interest to continue in this competition.

AmeriCorps members are individuals engaged in community service who may receive a living allowance during their service. Upon successful completion of service, members receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award from the National Service Trust.

## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

SerVermont announces the opportunity to apply for AmeriCorps State funds to new or re-competing AmeriCorps applicants through a state competition for the 2021-2022 AmeriCorps program year. AmeriCorps State funds are made available through the CNCS, the federal agency that oversees national service, including AmeriCorps. SerVermont administers an annual Request for Proposals (RFP) process in conjunction with the release of the CNCS AmeriCorps State and National Notice of Funding Opportunity or Notice of Funding Available (NOFO/NOFA)

and CNCS' AmeriCorps competition. SerVermont's RFP is based on the CNCS materials that govern this competition.

AmeriCorps grants are awarded to eligible organizations to recruit, train, and manage AmeriCorps member who address unmet community needs while in service. Any eligible applicant seeking to apply for AmeriCorps State funds in Vermont must respond to this RFP and all related deadlines. SerVermont's Request for Proposals should be read together with the AmeriCorps State and National FY 2021 NOFO/NOFA, 2021 Application Instructions, 2021 Mandatory Supplemental Guidance, 2021 Performance Measure Instructions, and other related documents. CNCS' national-level documents regarding the 2021 AmeriCorps competition supersede this RFP.

SerVermont seeks to supports a strong and balanced portfolio of AmeriCorps programs that; (1) addresses a wide range of CNCS focus areas, including CNCS focus areas in which SerVermont does not currently support an AmeriCorps program, (2) has diverse state-wide geographic representation, including placing AmeriCorps members in historically underserved communities, and communities that do not have AmeriCorps resources present; (3) engages historically underserved populations as AmeriCorps members, including opportunity youth, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and individuals living in poverty; (4) is likely to operate with compliance and at a high level of performance, including fully utilizing the funding resources available in VT, and maximizing the number of service opportunities in VT.

### **AMERICORPS REGULATIONS, TERMS AND CONDITIONS, & APPLICATION MATERIALS**

The AmeriCorps State and National FY 2021 NOFO and other materials can be found at the CNCS website: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2021/ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants-fy-2021>

Potential applicants should familiarize themselves with AmeriCorps programming by visiting the CNCS website.

More information on how AmeriCorps State and National programs are administered can be found on the CNCS website on the "Applying for AmeriCorps State and National Grants" page: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/ASNgrants>

Information on managing AmeriCorps grants can be found on the CNCS website on the "Managing AmeriCorps Grants" page: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/manage-ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants>

A downloadable copy of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 as amended by the Serve America Act and a downloadable copy of the AmeriCorps Regulations, 45 CFR Chapter XXV (2012) can be found at this link: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/about/legislation>

### **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

Public or private nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and other community organizations; institutions of higher education; government entities within Vermont (e.g., cities, counties); labor organizations; partnerships and consortia; Tribes; and intermediaries planning to subgrant awarded funds are encouraged to apply.

Organizations that have been convicted of a Federal crime are disqualified from receiving the assistance described in this RFP and related CNCS documents. Organizations described in section 501 (c)(4) of the Internal Revenue code of 1986, that engage in lobbying activities are not eligible to apply.

### **TYPES OF AWARDS**

AmeriCorps programs receive funding from one of two sources, Competitive or Formula Awards, and operate as either cost-reimbursement or fixed price grants. Fixed price grants are available only to previously funded programs with a track record of compliance. Programs submit one proposal to apply to any type of award. Regardless of Competitive or Formula funding, all AmeriCorps programs follow the AmeriCorps Regulations, Terms and Conditions, and State requirements. The actual level of funding available is subject to the availability of annual federal appropriations.

#### **Competitive Award**

Competitive funds are awarded by CNCS. SerVermont selects applications to submit to CNCS for review in competition with proposals from all single and multi-state applicants. The Corporation runs a Peer and Staff Review to make competitive funding determinations. Applications submitted to the competition that are not selected by CNCS for Competitive funding are automatically considered for a Formula Award from SerVermont.

#### **Formula Award**

Formula funds are awarded by SerVermont. Formula funds are made available to SerVermont based on the federal allocation for AmeriCorps and population. The amount of funds available to SerVermont depends on the allocation from CNCS. SerVermont does not run a separate process for Formula Awards, but considers all applications submitted to SerVermont for formula funding, including those which are not submitted to the CNCS competition.

### **SCOPE OF SERVICES**

Successful applicants will be expected to operate the full AmeriCorps program as awarded in compliance with all applicable rules and regulations at both the federal and state level.

### **MINIMUM PROGRAM SIZE**

CNCS and SerVermont do not have a threshold for the minimum number of members or MSYs (Member Service Years) required of applications in this competition. However, proposed AmeriCorps programs should be large enough to make a significant difference in the community they serve, and provide an intervention at scale. SerVermont strongly encourages applicants to design programs of at-least 15 MSY, or at least 20 members. The basic administrative costs, requirements, and administrative burden associated with operating an AmeriCorps program makes achieving an economy of scale necessary.

Only new applicants should request less-than 15 MSY or 20 members and should have potential to grow in future years to 15 MSY or 20 members. Potential applicants that cannot support at-least 15 MSY or 20 members are encouraged to collaborate with other organizations or applicants to achieve that threshold, and SerVermont encourages joint collaborative applications among organizations that have similar organizational missions, identified program goals, and community partner agencies.

If you believe your application will be for less-than 15 MSY or 20 slots, you are encouraged to consult with SerVermont prior to submission of your application.

### **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

Successful applicants will be expected to: 1) meet the performance measures outlined in their final CNCS application, 2) enroll 100% of the Member Service Years awarded to them, 3) utilize 100% of the AmeriCorps dollars awarded to them, 4) meet the match listed in their budget, 5) operate the program in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, terms, conditions and regulations.

SerVermont and the Agency of Human Services utilize performance based financial reimbursements in our grant agreements to ensure that programs operate at full capacity.

### **METHOD OF AWARD AND EVALUATION CRITERIA**

SerVermont solicits proposals annually and makes determinations on which proposals will be sent to compete in the national competition, which proposals will only be considered for formula funding, and how formula funds are awarded.

SerVermont is interested in funding proposals that; (1) align with the CNCS Focus Areas outlined in the AmeriCorps NOFO; (2) focus on CNCS Funding Priorities outlined in the AmeriCorps NOFO; (3) offer specific, proven, and effective solutions that address local community needs; (4) offer meaningful AmeriCorps member experiences; (5) align with existing State and local initiatives; (6) leverage AmeriCorps resources towards results, and (7) are cost effective, generating high ratio of federal funds to local funds, bringing significant outside financial support to the initiative, and/or propose a low cost per Member Service Year (MSY).

SerVermont staff and commissioners will review proposals. All applications that meet the eligibility requirements, follow the applications instructions, and have met submission deadlines will be reviewed. The review process includes reviewing applications against the basic selection criteria included in the AmeriCorps NOFO, ensuring innovation, and ensuring diversity across the portfolio in terms of geographic, demographic, and programmatic distribution. In evaluating applications for funding, SerVermont staff and commissioners assess overall program design, organizational capacity to manage the grant and program, budget adequacy, and past performance if applicable.

Proposals that demonstrate innovation and creative approaches to address pressing challenges, are based on strong evidence, are responsive to the CNCS NOFO and Application Instructions, and leverage outside funding sources and/or request a low cost per MSY will be most competitive.

During review, suggestions for improving or clarifying applications will be compiled, and feedback will be provided to the applicant. Feedback and clarification will be provided to applicants by December 14, 2020. SerVermont may decide to submit an application to CNCS contingent upon certain changes or clarifications being made in the application. Applicants that have met the minimum criteria and submitted a responsive application will have an opportunity to clarify their proposals and respond to commission feedback for **resubmission by December 18, 2020**.

Once final applications are submitted to SerVermont, the final AmeriCorps State slate of applications will be submitted to the CNCS competition by the January 6, 2021 deadline. SerVermont is not obligated to submit all applications to the CNCS competition. SerVermont reserves the right to make final decisions regarding this competition in a manner that best serves the strategic interests of the national service community in Vermont.

Applications that are submitted to the national competition are considered for Competitive funds. Competitive funding determinations are made by CNCS with notifications expected in May 2021.

Formula funding decisions are made by SerVermont after the announcement of national competition results from CNCS. Final funding for all grant awards is contingent upon federal appropriations from CNCS. Applications which are not submitted to the national competition may be considered for Formula funds at the state level. All applications submitted to the CNCS competition will be automatically considered for Formula funding if not selected for Competitive funding by CNCS.

SerVermont makes formula funding decisions based upon the strength of individual applications, as well as strategic considerations at the statewide level. SerVermont will make funding decisions that maximize the opportunities to serve in VT, address critical needs, leverage available dollars, and strengthen the national service field in VT. To maximize the impact of AmeriCorps resources in Vermont, SerVermont will fund programs that can demonstrate community impact and solve community problems using evidence-based or evidence-informed approach (e.g. performance measure data, quality of research, theory of change).

SerVermont reserves the right to prioritize providing funding to existing programs over making new awards. SerVermont is not obligated to award all available funds, or to fund all applications that are submitted.

## **APPLICATION**

SerVermont uses a multi-step application process that includes the submission of a Letter of Intent, introductory briefing session, technical assistance with concept development, review and feedback from SerVermont Commissioners, and the submission of a full proposal that responds to the CNCS NOFO and other documents. Note that while CNCS has significantly streamlined the application process and competition, the NOFO, Application Instructions, Performance Measure Instructions, and Mandatory Supplemental Guidance must all be thoroughly reviewed and understood to ensure a compliant application. Applications that are noncompliant or do not follow the instructions will not be reviewed or submitted to CNCS for review. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure a compliant application.

Please refer to the full timeline within this RFP for all deadlines.

The Letter of Intent allows applicants to express their interest in AmeriCorps funding, and briefly present their proposed program concept. SerVermont staff will review all Letters of Intent and offer technical assistance to all interested applicants to ensure strong program designs and full applications are submitted.

Full applications will be submitted through CNCS' online grants management system, eGrants. The application should be responsive to the CNCS NOFO and other documents and provide

reviewers with a clear and compelling understanding of the proposed program including the need in the community, a description of exactly what AmeriCorps members will be doing to address the need, and recent and relevant data at the national, state, and local level that support the described AmeriCorps intervention and role of AmeriCorps members in that intervention. Reviewers should be able to envision what AmeriCorps members will be doing day-to-day and understand the overall goals and outcomes of the program after reading the application. Applicants should not assume that reviewers are familiar with the proposed program or intervention even if applicants are re-competing or well known to the public.

Applications should propose activity under at least one of the Focus Areas as outlined in the CNCS NOFO. In addition, CNCS has established Funding Priorities and seeks to prioritize the investment of national service resources in programs that address issues outlined in their funding priorities. Strong applications will propose activities that demonstrate high alignment with CNCS Funding Priorities. AmeriCorps program designs should not propose the AmeriCorps program itself being a solution to the problem. AmeriCorps members should be implementing an intervention to address a problem through direct service, and AmeriCorps member activities should be explicitly stated in the application.

SerVermont will not support applications that are unresponsive to the CNCS AmeriCorps NOFO, do not follow the CNCS Application Instructions, and/or do not follow the SerVermont timeline and instructions.

SerVermont anticipates a high level of response to this RFP. Because of high interest and limited funding availability, SerVermont does not anticipate being able to fund all applicants.

### **INTENT TO APPLY**

Applicants are **required** to submit Letters of Intent for AmeriCorps funding to SerVermont via email to **both** Sharon Hearne ([Sharon.hearne@vermont.gov](mailto:Sharon.hearne@vermont.gov)) and Phil Kolling ([Philip.kolling@vermont.gov](mailto:Philip.kolling@vermont.gov)) by **October 9, 2020 at 12:00 Noon EST**. Only applicants that have submitted a letter of intent and AmeriCorps Risk Assessment with supporting documents (if applicable) by the deadline will be considered for funding.

Letters of Intent must be no longer than three typed pages (not including the AmeriCorps Risk Assessment, if applicable), and must include the following information:

#### **Page 1: Cover Sheet**

1. Legal Name of Applicant
2. AmeriCorps Program Name, if different from Legal Name of Applicant
3. Contact Person



4. Contact information including: address, phone, and email.
5. CNCS Focus Area that the program will address (if any).
6. CNCS Funding Priority that the program will address (if any).
7. Estimate of the number of AmeriCorps members and Member Service Years (MSY) the application will request.
8. Estimate of the funding request the application will request.

### **Page 2-3: Program Concept**

One to two pages describing the general concept of the program, what specific direct service activities members would be providing in the community, how those service activities solve a community problem or challenge, and what research supports the proposed approach to solving the problem or challenge.

A completed AmeriCorps Risk Assessment must be attached to the Letter of Intent email along with **ALL** supporting documents for the risk assessment for all “New” and “Recompeting” applicants. Continuation applications DO NOT need to complete the risk assessment. The AmeriCorps Risk Assessment is available on SerVermont’s website, or upon request can be emailed.

### **GRANT INFORMATION SESSIONS**

SerVermont will host two Grant Information Sessions via Skype webinar / conference call. Attending a session **IS mandatory** for **ALL** applicants. The sessions will be on **September 22, 10-11 AM EST**; and **September 24, 1-2 PM EST**. To register for either session please email Philip.kolling@vermont.gov, specifying which session you would like to attend, your name, organization, contact phone number and email. *If you are unable to attend either session, alternative arrangements can be made with prior notice.*

### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

To develop a diverse and competitive portfolio of proposals and programs, SerVermont will offer technical assistance to all applicants as they develop their proposals. Please contact SerVermont staff if you would like technical assistance. Technical assistance will be available on an appointment basis during business hours and as available by contacting: Phil Kolling, Executive Director [philip.kolling@vermont.gov](mailto:philip.kolling@vermont.gov), 760-0042

Between **September 16** and **October 9**, SerVermont will offer technical assistance regarding concept development and program design. Technical assistance regarding concept development will not be available after the letter of intent deadline (October 9).

Between **October 11** and **November 1**, SerVermont will offer technical assistance regarding program design and application will be available to organizations which have submitted letters of intent.

Between **November 2** and **November 8**, technical assistance will be provided related to submission of applications in CNCS' eGrants system only.

### **SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION IN CNCS ONLINE SYSTEM**

Applications are submitted through CNCS' online system, eGrants. Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop and save their proposal in a word processing program outside of CNCS' system, not within eGrants. SerVermont staff will be available to provide training and technical assistance with submitting through the online system upon request, and requests must be made well ahead of the deadline for submission.

All applicants, including previously funded applicants, are **strongly encouraged** to create an account in eGrants as soon as possible, and familiarize themselves with the system's rules of behavior. NOTE: All individual system users must establish their own unique account and no account may be shared by multiple individuals. Applicants must ensure that the individual who submits their application has the signatory authority to do so. SerVermont **strongly recommends** beginning an application in the online system no later than 10 days before the due date to SerVermont. SerVermont **strongly recommends** submitting applications in the system as early as possible prior to the due date and allowing enough time to address and resolve all technical issues prior to the deadline. Applications are due to SerVermont in the online system by **November 6, 2020, 12:00 Noon EST**.

NOTE: Due to COVID-19 and unforeseen circumstance, early submission in 2020 is encouraged more than ever.

Applications submitted in the online system after the deadline will be presumed non-compliant and will not be considered for funding. In order to overcome this presumption, the applicant must provide a written explanation or justification of the extenuating circumstance(s) of the delay including, 1) the timing and specific cause(s) of the delay, 2) a National Service Hotline ticket number, 3) the information provided to the applicant by the National Service Hotline, 4) any other documentation or evidence that supports the justification, 5) ensure that SerVermont receives the justification and any other evidence that substantiates the claimed extenuating circumstance via email no later than one business day after the application deadline(s) stated in this RFP.

NOTE: An applicant's failure to provide themselves enough time to submit their application via the online system by the deadline is **NOT** an extenuating circumstance, and applicants should

not expect that SerVermont staff and/or National Service Hotline staff will be available or able to assist with submission on the day of the deadline. SerVermont is not obligated to consider any applications submitted after the deadline and reserves the right to determine whether to accept a late application on a case-by-case basis. Applicants that do not submit a justification or any other evidence to overcome the presumption of non-compliance within the published timeframe will not be reviewed or selected for award.

SerVermont will not consider an advance request to submit a late application. Applicants are encouraged to continue working on their application until it is submitted. If you are experiencing technical difficulties, please carefully review and follow the guidance listed above, and submit your application as soon as possible.

### **BUDGET REQUIREMENTS**

SerVermont requires that all applicants follow CNCS budget instructions, and cost per MSY guidelines. SerVermont encourages applicants to propose as low a cost per MSY as is necessary to fully operate the proposed program. SerVermont encourages applicants to only propose as much match as they can **realistically** generate and meet. Applications with adequate budgets that propose a low cost per MSY are most competitive.

Prior to submission of an application, applicants should double check their budgets to ensure that the math used to calculate various line items is correct, and the total request in the budget narrative matches the dollar value listed in the Executive Summary.

### **MINIMUM INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS**

All applicants must meet the minimum insurance requirements required by the state, as outlined in state Attachment C: Standard State Provisions for Contracts and Grants, revised December 15, 2017. A link to Attachment C can be found on SerVermont's website.

### **GRANT APPLICATION TIMELINE**

NOTE: Single State Applicants **do not follow the deadlines listed in the CNCS NOFO or respond directly to CNCS regarding this application**. Single State Applicants follow the schedule below and communicate with SerVermont.

<b>Application Action</b>	<b>Date</b>
Notice of Funding released from CNCS	September 11, 2020
Request for Proposals released by SerVermont	September 14, 2020
Grant Information Meetings (via Skype, or phone)	September 22, 2020: 10-11 AM September 24, 2020:

	1-2 PM
Technical Assistance available to all by appointment (ongoing)	September 16- October 9, 2020
Letter of Intent to Apply and Organizational Risk Assessment and related documents due to SerVermont	<b>October 9, 2020 12:00 Noon EST</b>
Technical Assistance available to organizations which submitted Letters of Intent by appointment (ongoing)	October 12 – October 30, 2020
Technical Assistance Available regarding submission of applications in eGrants ONLY	November 2 – November 6, 2020
Final Applications due in e-Grants to SerVermont	<b>November 6, 2020 12:00 Noon EST</b>
SerVermont Review of Proposals	November 9 – December 11, 2020
Clarification provided to Applicants by	December 14, 2020
Clarification submission to SerVermont	December 18, 2020 12:00 Noon EST
Deadline for SerVermont to submit applications to CNCS for competition.	January 6, 2021 5:00pm
CNCS Competitive funding decisions	Mid-May, 2021
Formula funding decisions made by SerVermont	Late May 2021
All CNCS Grant Awards Complete	July 31, 2021